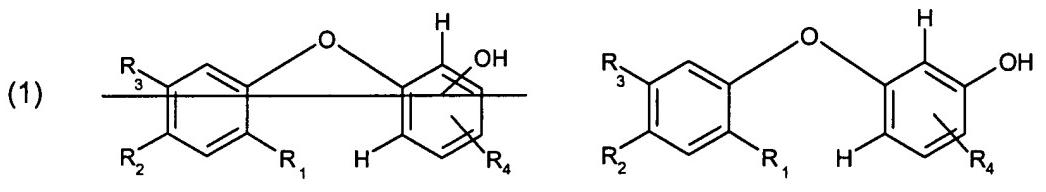


1-21 (cancelled).

22. (currently amended): An antimicrobial method, which comprises contacting a substrate with an antimicrobiially effective amount of a hydroxydiphenyl ether compound of the formula



wherein, when OH is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage

R₄ is C₁-C₂₀alkyl, C₅-C₇cycloalkyl, C₄-C₆alkylcarbonyl, C₄-C₂₀alkoxy, phenyl or phenyl-C₁-C₃alkyl;

R₂ is hydrogen;

R₃ is C₁-C₂₀alkyl or C₁-C₂₀alkoxy;

R₄ is hydrogen; and wherein,

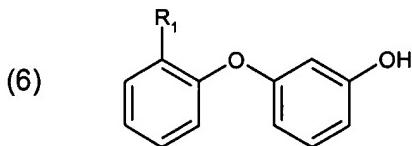
when OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage

R₂ is hydrogen, C₁-C₂₀alkyl, hydroxy substituted C₁-C₂₀alkyl or C₁-C₆alkylcarbonyl;

R₁ and R₃ are independently of each other hydrogen or C₁-C₂₀alkyl;

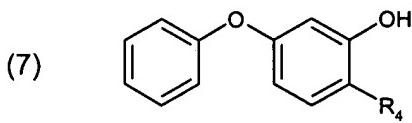
R₄ is hydrogen, hydroxy substituted C₁-C₂₀alkyl or C₅-C₇cycloalkyl.

23. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula



wherein R₁ is C₁-C₅alkyl is employed.

24. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula



wherein R₄ is C₁-C₅alkyl is employed.

25 (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22 which is carried out during finishing of undyed and dyed or printed fibre materials.

26. (previously presented): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of skin, mucous membranes or hair which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.

27. (previously presented): A method of use of a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 which comprises the incorporation of an antimicrobially effective amount of said compound into polymeric materials or the antimicrobial finishing of said polymeric materials with an antimicrobially effective amount of said compound as defined in claim 22.

28. (previously presented): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of a hard surface which comprises applying to the hard surface an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22.

29. (previously presented): A method for the antimicrobial treatment of teeth and gums which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.

30. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a personal care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a cosmetically tolerable carrier or auxiliary is employed.

31. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein an oral care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary is employed.

32. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a detergent composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary is employed.

33. (currently amended): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 wherein OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage

~~and R₂, R₃ and R₄ are hydrogen and R₁ is C₁-C₂₀ alkyl, or wherein OH is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage and R₂ and R₄ are hydrogen and R₁ and R₃ are C₁-C₂₀ alkyl is employed.~~

34-36. (cancelled).

37. (currently amended): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 wherein OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage and R₁, R₂ and R₃ are hydrogen and R₄ is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage and is C₁-C₂₀alkyl is employed.

38. (cancelled).